

Kim Cerullo, from Wethersfield CT

### **Testimony in Favor of House Bill 5290: An Act Increasing Financial Assistance for Grandparents and Other Non-Parent Relatives Who Are Raising Children**

Good morning Senator Flexer and Representative Serra, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to the Aging Committee today. My name is Kim Cerullo, I am from Wethersfield, and I am speaking to you today in favor of House Bill 5290, An Act Increasing Financial Assistance for Grandparents and Other Non-Parent Relatives Who Are Raising Children.

Kinship care is such an important failsafe for vulnerable children. When a parent dies, is incapacitated, or is otherwise unable to take care of a child, hardworking grandparents, aunts, and uncles across the state step up to the plate. This spares the child from the stress and trauma that could come from a major life transition. I have seen this first hand with a cousin who could no longer emotionally or financially provide for his daughter. His parents took on the challenge of raising the child instead. Their sacrifice meant that she did not have to move, change schools, or face the extreme stress of entering a foster placement with people she did not know.

Kinship care benefits the state as well as the children themselves. When families identify a kinship placement for their children, the Department of Children and Families saves money and time in the foster caretaker recruitment process. I am not sure how much economic value non-parent caretakers provide to Connecticut specifically, but a study by the White House Conference on Aging found that grandparent caretakers provided approximately 6.5 billion dollars of economic value annually nationwide.<sup>1</sup> This number does not even take into account the aunts, uncles, and other non-grandparent relatives who provide care. With over 19,000 grandparents providing kinship care in the state of Connecticut, we surely receive our fair share of that economic value.<sup>2</sup>

Non-parent relatives play an important role in providing childcare and keeping families unified, but we cannot take advantage of poor or vulnerable individuals who have made this sacrifice. About sixteen percent of these kinship caretakers live in poverty, and many benefit from Temporary Family Assistance.<sup>3</sup> However, they may find, especially if they are not the grandparents, that it is very difficult or even impossible to receive benefits on behalf of the child they care for. Furthermore, TFA benefits vary across the state based on cost of living, meaning that the relatives who need the most help may be the ones receiving the fewest benefits.

It is a difficult budget year, and this is one difficult year of many to come. However, I strongly believe that if we can afford to subsidize non-relative foster placements, we can afford to subsidize the small proportion of kinship placements that are in desperate need of help. HB 5290 is an equitable solution, as the benefits, mirroring subsidized foster placement rates, would be uniform across the state. The bill would be a great first step in keeping more vulnerable families together during the kinds of challenging times and circumstances that necessitate kinship placement in the first place. I strongly encourage you to consider HB 5290 as an investment in Connecticut families this year. Thank you for your time.

1 White House Conference on Aging (2005) The Booming Dynamics of Aging: From Awareness to Action. Retrieved from [nicoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/2005-WHCOA-Final-Report.pdf](http://nicoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/2005-WHCOA-Final-Report.pdf)

2 AARP (2011). Grandfacts: State fact sheets for grandparents and other relatives raising children. Retrieved from [www.childrensdefense.org/library/data/state-data-repository/gf/2010/grandally-connecticut-2010.pdf](http://www.childrensdefense.org/library/data/state-data-repository/gf/2010/grandally-connecticut-2010.pdf)

3 White House Conference on Aging (2005)